

have found themselves in the institution as a result of a turning point or a moment in their lives over which they had no control.

focus question

- Zac only adds humour to the play.
Do you agree?

themes

love and fidelity

As functioning human beings, love is one of our basic requirements; it is what we need to survive, and thrive. It is what gives meaning to our lives. *Così* openly questions and challenges the notion of love; what it is, what it looks like, and why it is such an important factor in our lives. We want to know that our love is real and reciprocated. We want to feel safe and secure in love, and, above all else, we want to believe in love as it affirms many of our inherent values that it should be "an unswerving emotion" (p. 49). Similarly, Ferrando and Guglielmo, want to confirm for themselves the nature of their relationships with their fiancées, the sisters Fiordiligi and Dorabella.

This view of love is, however, at odds with the view of love and fidelity presented in the play. In the 1970s (the world of *Così*), infidelity and 'free love' are not only tolerated by some, but promoted as an ideal. Both Lucy and Nick are characters who embody this cynical and critical view of love. In their infidelity, they flagrantly reject the traditional sanctity of love as an expression of commitment to, trust in, and loyalty to another person. Instead, they substitute their own sexuality, sexual freedom and desire to represent the traits of love. While love may be considered to be an indulgence offered to the bourgeois, it is in fact what distinguishes and humanises Lewis in the end. While his actions and decisions ultimately marginalise him from his friends, Lewis is able to transcend from the rhetoric that love has become a trivial pursuit and is not as important as politics, to his affirmation that "without love the world wouldn't mean much" (p. 70). His recognition of the importance of love distances him from his friends, whose relationship "didn't last that long as both were not into fidelity" (p. 89). Lewis acknowledges the value and importance of love in life and that it is not merely "the last gasp of bourgeois romanticism" (p. 33).

The enduring nature of love becomes a significant feature of *Così*. The play suggests that love can sustain, hearten, advance and stimulate people's lives. It suggests that the qualities of love exist beyond the idealised romantic notions of a love affair, or a sexual relationship, and rely upon commitment and loyalty. Lewis learns that love is about a connection between two people, rather than the desires or selfish pursuits of an individual. He learns that love is a partnership where two people have shared experiences, a binding trust

Sanctity:

sacredness,
reverence.

Marginalise:

to distance or
distinguish.

Rhetoric:

talk or suggestion.

and loyalty that require commitment. Ironically, it is Julie who is able to articulate what love means to her the most passionately: for her "love is hallucinating without drugs" (p. 61). She also reinforces the commitment relationships demand when she reveals that she will move to Sydney with her girlfriend as "she's stood by [her], through thick and thin" (p. 87). For Lewis, love is so much more than sex and he comes to realise and acknowledge that "you want to remain true to your lovers ... an old-fashioned concept, granted" (p. 43), whereas Nick does not recognise that love, sex and responsibility necessarily have any correlation and believes that "women shouldn't come between mates" (p. 77), divorcing himself from the surrender as well as the commitment that love requires.

Fidelity is the faithfulness in a relationship.

Salient: important, outstanding.

To be contemptuous is to be disapproving or disdainful.

While the term fidelity is often associated with a sexual relationship and infers that there is faithfulness and loyalty in the relationship, Lewis realises that the nature of fidelity has more relevance than just in a sexual nature. Lewis makes a commitment to the relationship he forges with the patients; he makes a commitment to his belief in love and his pursuit of love and marriage with a 'special' someone. The willingness for a partner to commit to fidelity in a relationship is in many ways a state of mind: one's acceptance of, and the worth that is afforded to, the relationship. In many ways it relies upon the relationship being valued and respected. Poignantly, Lewis comes to learn that it is also possible to be faithful to one's values and integrity and this transcends to the most salient consideration of fidelity. It is ourselves and our values to which we need to be committed and loyal. If we begin to compromise these parts of ourselves, we are perhaps as delusional as some of the patients in the mental institution.

In the play, men's attitudes towards women and the entanglement between love and sex is often confronting. Ruth's poignant revelations about the violent and oppressive nature of a previous relationship, in which she was abused and mistreated, sits uncomfortably and parallels the way that Doug sees and treats women as sexual objects. While this may be because of the volatile nature of his relationship with his mother, it is disturbingly not only Doug but also the modern-day Nick who is contemptuous of love. Nick believes that love holds no place in modern society, seeing it as a frivolous distraction while greater, more burning social issues such as the war and the suffering it causes, warrant our attention. Nick's rallying for 'large-scale' causes of suffering, rather than those more personal, is clearly a result of his careless and somewhat ill-considered attitude towards what effort is

To demean is to put down or belittle.

The phoenix is a mythical bird.

required to maintain relationships. However, the reality is that love and the pursuit of love should be what 'radicalise[s]' us all, it should become the driving and motivating force for all of our actions. Nick's approach ignores the fact that love is what drives human emotion, intent and desire, so while it is often the origin of conflict, it is worth fighting for. Ironically, while both Nick and Lucy openly object to the sexism in the opera, seeing it as demeaning and offensive to the participants, their infidelity disrespects and erodes their relationship with Lewis as they compromise and betray his values.

Inherent in the play is a deep cynicism of love. There is mistrust expressed by both men and women; sane and insane. Men and women alike are confused by love and feel vulnerable and this cynically questions whether "Woman's constancy is like the Phoenix of Arabia" (p. 34). Love is a volatile emotion in life that creates great uncertainty for many people, yet has a fabulous mystique and the play reflects this.

focus questions

- Does the play present love as a worthy ideal?
- Is love over-idealised and romanticised by the "lucky few"?
- Love crosses all boundaries. Is this the case in the play?

idealism

Così explores the notion of idealism and how, in spite of many cultural or social barriers created, we still ultimately pursue the ideal of humanity. This pursuit of what we perceive to be perfect harmony in interaction, cooperation and charitable acts with one another is central. However, it often leaves us unfulfilled as, by its very nature, it is an ideal and therefore beyond our reach.

While people and systems are fallible, it is the idealism of people like Lewis and Nick that can bring about change. Lewis believes his play can change the course of the actors' lives, and Nick believes that he can change the political landscape of Australia. They both firmly believe that their actions are impacting positively either on the individual lives of others or on the 'greater good', and while we all need this optimism, the truth is often strategically disguised in the "clanging, banging, [...] bedlam all around us" (p. 13) that becomes the reality of our daily lives.

Just like Nick, Roy demonstrates to us that we all need to have something to believe in, something to strive for. Roy's vision is to re-create the world that was his ideal childhood. Zac, in his pursuit of his own ideal, admits that "if I could put up with reality I wouldn't be in here [the asylum]" (p. 62). Nowra is not tempted to moralise or overdramatise the reality of the characters' plights, nor does he allow his characters an enchanted ending: even for one of most 'normal' characters, Julie, reality was tragic and unadorned.

focus question

- How important is the pursuit of ideals for an individual and society?

illusion

Così highlights the confrontation and synergy that exists between art and reality. The reality is that Lewis' life is replicating what is being acted out on stage – as he directs it. The irony is that he cannot steer the direction of his own life because it is at the mercy of others, in particular Lucy.

The nature of theatre is that it requires the enactment of an illusion or a fantasy into a real and visual presentation on stage. However, translation of works of literature into performances will always be subject to a series of interpretations and performances, and in turn, are subject to the vision of the director. What was real for the playwright, or author, is transformed into another reality for the actors on the part of the director, and yet another for the audience viewing the production. This suggests that there are degrees of separation between all of our stories – all of our interpretations are dependent upon our experiences, our realities.

Dreams are central to the play, and our dreams are our unconscious interplay between our real and our metaphysical worlds. The play becomes Roy's dream, he has "a vision" and he works toward recreating the sad reality of his circumstances, including his childhood. Roy fantasises about the possibilities of recreating a "world that was as far removed from this depressing asylum as possible" (p. 63). He longs to exist in a world where he is accepted, where he belongs. Sadly, the reality for Roy is that he has never had that, and is never likely to have. The play offers him an escape, a microcosm that enables

him to recreate his life, even if it is an illusion. Conversely, the play and Lewis' involvement in it shatter the illusion of Lewis and Lucy's relationship. There is no indication that their relationship changed significantly throughout the course of Lewis' involvement in *Così*. So, the implications are that the infidelity and betrayal existed in their relationship regardless, and Lewis was unaware of the deceit. Nowra suggests that we create our own realities and illusions and that often we are so enmeshed in our lives that the difference between the two is difficult to determine.

Our illusory world is what we imagine or create for ourselves.

Our illusory world can be both an exhilarating place that offers us inspiration, hope and dreams, and a place that creates a void for our reality. At times we struggle with which world we are either able to engage with or given access to.

For the cast of the play, they have been given the opportunity to explore another world. For many of them the play itself provides them with a source of escape from the horrible reality that their lives have become and they can pretend to be someone else. It is shown to be much more. Julie sees it as a means of recreating the connections she had in her 'real' world, by escaping the confines of the asylum. Whereas Cherry was expecting "to have fun in the theatre" (p. 11), Roy's interpretation of fun was the whole dramatic element of opera. As the play progresses, the audience becomes part of the illusion of a re-created world for the patients. They see the patients behaving and interacting 'normally', discussing complex issues such as love and fidelity, confiding in each other and exposing themselves to what become their real fears of failure and of being exposed. They reveal vulnerabilities that are not too dissimilar to our own.

For the audience, the relationship between illusion and reality becomes frighteningly apparent in the scene when Roy 'method acts' the electroconvulsive therapy. He convulses on the floor, confronting the audience with the violent and undignified methods of treatment used on the mentally ill. For Roy, it was acting and therefore he was creating an illusion; however, he was drawing on what was once a reality for him. The confronting nature of this scene is articulated by Ruth when she states "the more real it is, the more real it is." (p. 60). This is consolidated for the audience in the reflection from Ruth that we can "handle something being an illusion or real but not at the same time" (p. 26) which, in effect, the setting of this play in a mental asylum promotes.

Synergy: when the interaction between two or more things produces more than simply adding them together.

Nowra reminds the audience that the confusion that exists between illusion and reality is not confined to the walls of the asylum. Nick has a false sense of the impact of his one moratorium march, which he believes changed Australia forever. His illusion is perpetuated by his desire and, in many ways, his own ego. Similarly, while Roy may have high ideals for the play, the more cynical Justin has no difficulty recognising the reality of the theatre project. Justin hopes that, metaphorically, with the holes in the theatre roof and the possible failure of the production, "it doesn't rain on the night" (p. 5). This, coupled with Lewis' materialistic and pragmatic acknowledgement that he's involved merely for the money, suggests that while we can be distracted by our own illusion, there are also elements within our society that keep us firmly grounded, even if it be against our will.

focus question

- Does Nowra suggest that reality provides little comfort for us as a society?

identity

Nowra challenges his audience to consider who they are, what it is they believe in, and how they are perceived by others or their society. He also challenges the audience to consider what it is that shapes our identity. Do we create our identity or is it imposed on us by others?

The play opens with Lewis struggling to assert himself among the patients, attempting to convince the patients that he is a legitimate director, when he is in fact different from them and has undertaken the role because he "need[s] the money" (p. 1). At this stage of the play, Lewis believes that the difference between himself and his amateur actors is significant and obvious. Ironically, when Roy first encounters Lewis he confuses him with a patient and asks "what ward are you from?" (p. 2) Nowra clearly establishes from the outset that the differences are indeterminable. Lewis is initially intimidated by Roy's dominance and exuberance, but soon succumbs to Roy when he realises that it is Roy's dream, he "aim[s] for the stars ... is that such a bad thing?" (p. 15). This allows Roy to assert himself, rather than promote himself, because ultimately, as Justin indicates, the performance is about "bring[ing] them out of their shells" (p. 6).

As the play progresses the transformation in Lewis becomes apparent. He is buoyed by his conviction in what he is doing, and feels a sense of commitment not only to the project, but also the people involved in it. This marks the beginning of his burgeoning sense of self that enables him to develop his own set of values and beliefs: it is when we are able to achieve this that we are truly shaping our own identity. The theatre creates a very positive environment for Lewis: he develops as an independent man. The experience fashions someone who is principled and has matured as a result of his ability to accept and adapt to change.

In contrast, Lewis' friend Nick is initially assured of his place in the world, however, in the end he is exposed as the more flawed character, one who is transient in nature. Nick's identity is very firmly established and he is grounded in his role as a political activist. He has been shaped significantly by the people and events around him. The political climate at the time shaped a nation; it divided generations and politically activated the youth. The fact that Nick progressed to become a Labor MP indicates that Nick's views and activism moulded who he became as an adult. It also ridicules his 'identity' as an activist.

Doug too has been imprisoned and thus shaped by his environment. The cold, dehumanising world of the mental institution made him a victim and promoted a bitterness that manifested itself in anger towards not only the society who rejected him, but also a gender (his mother's) that moulded his ideas. This influenced his responses to others and thus shaped his identity. Whereas Nick's identity is shaped by the people and events around him, Doug's identity is shaped by his isolation.

focus questions:

- Society can both determine and define our identity. Do you agree?
- Our identity is shaped by our experiences and circumstances. To what extent do you believe this to be true?

sanity

Cosi takes a warm-hearted look at the madness and mayhem in a world where 'sanity' doesn't exist, and what's more, is not expected to exist. The government was involved in an ideological war that was deemed 'madness' by the peace movement because of the 'unwinnable' nature

If two things are juxtaposed, they are contrasted against each other.

*Something **fickle** is likely to change or be inconsistent or unstable.*

***Euphemism:** an inoffensive word or phrase substituted for one considered offensive or hurtful.*

of the Vietnam conflict. This, coupled with the absurd manner in which the government conscripted young men to participate in their war, created the sense that the whole world had gone mad. This play, however, is set in the actual mad world, a world where people have been deemed such a threat to the definition of normality that they are excluded from participating in society and locked away. They are isolated physically and, through medication, emotionally. Sanity of the mind is juxtaposed to the insanity of war; the madness of the war is symbolic of the madness of the patients.

Many of the patient's apparent eccentricities are judged and deemed unacceptable by their society which is why they find themselves where they are. However, others' actions, such as the government of the day, while 'mad' in many people's views, were deemed 'acceptable' by the imposed standards of our society about what is right, or 'normal'. The definitions of 'normal' and 'acceptable' are fickle.

Society's assessment of what is normal or tolerable behaviour shifts significantly in the play. Julie's dependency on drugs is deemed unacceptable for society's consumption, so her family has her committed for a 'holiday'. As a society we have often struggled to accept and tolerate behaviour that is beyond the 'norm'. Thus, we create euphemisms, such as "going on a holiday" to make those unacceptable actions more palatable.

In the play, Nowra frequently mocks the concept of sane versus insane, and our treatment and management of these people. Justin asserts his importance by rhetorically questioning "where would the world be without social workers?" (p. 7). Doug astutely retorts, "in tip top condition" (p. 7), suggesting that in reality, if left alone, those who are deemed 'insane' would be perfectly capable.

As the play progresses, the actors become increasingly 'normal' to us as an audience, particularly as we witness their challenges, fears and triumphs. Sadly though, this is not seen by all and is best characterised by Nick's vitriolic attack, initially on Henry, and then on the whole cast as he declares that "not only are they nuts, but they're right wing nuts" (p. 47). Here he suggests that they are so far removed from himself and his ideologies that it is they who must be different, and because they are so different they must be mad. Nick struggles with the fact that they exist outside his concept of people, or at least the people that fit into his new society.

focus questions

- To what extent do you agree that this play suggests that there is a very fine line between sanity and insanity?
- This play suggests that the definition of sanity is flexible. Do you agree?

dramatic techniques

structure

Così is a two act play with a traditional structure. Act one presents the characters and develops the external conflicts that exist among them, whereas act two reveals the internal conflicts that exist for the characters as individuals as well as their external struggle against their society. While at the end of the play the audience is given a sense of conclusion through Lewis' afterword, it is not a 'fairytale' ending for all – reflecting the reality and brutality of life for many of the vulnerable people within society.

play within a play

The dramatic technique of developing a play within a play is not a new concept, but it is an effective tool that enables Nowra to create the subtle ironies that exist in *Così* and to connect with and convey to his audience the sadness that is the characters' lives, without it being a deeply personal story or too uncomfortable for the audience. It enables his characters and the audience to create a distance between themselves and their stories. This distance allows the audience to critique their circumstance and what it suggests about society.

Through Nowra's use of the play within a play, the audience is able to gain a greater insight into the development of Lewis' character. The audience sees his life run parallel to the events in the play and consequently they can gain greater understanding of the changes that have occurred. The events in the play mirror his life and while he begins to take charge of the play, his personal life unravels. It is a clear example of life imitating art as the drama parallels Lewis' challenges with fidelity in his 'real life' relationship. Only at the very end of the play does Lewis step outside of the play, outside of the role of the director, and poignantly present the closing address, and this is as Lewis Riley, rather than the character that has been in the play. The effectiveness and impact of this is significant because the audience recognises the moment in time that the play presents, how all of the characters' lives have moved on, some for the better, and some not.

Lewis' closing address is poignant, or touching.

genre: comedy

There is little doubt that *Così* is a comedy. Throughout the play the audience find themselves laughing out loud at the situations that arise for the characters. There is humour in the characters' dialogue, their actions and the absurdity of the whole situation. Because of this, it would be easy to trivialise the play and dismiss it merely as a source of entertainment. However, behind the comedy, there are very serious issues, which suggest that this play can be labelled a black comedy. There is also an underlying, touching sadness to this piece of theatre. Within the layers of comedy, Nowra presents a bleak portrayal of what we are capable of as humans, a pessimistic view of the pain we are able to inflict upon one another. Nowra acknowledges that he "use[s] humour to move the play along and to reflect critically on what is often a tragedy of human suffering" (p. xi).

At times it is farcical: the timing of the ridiculous nature of the patients' antics illustrate this. For example, just as Lucy and Lewis articulate their decision to separate, Doug appears as the Messiah, perhaps as the saviour for Lewis out of a doomed relationship. Doug provides many other moments that are very funny; however, in contrast to these moments, he is also responsible for some of the cruellest and most offensive moments in the play.

Similarly, Roy's relationship with Lewis creates many comedic moments. Roy's outrageous vision of the patients performing an operatic work in a burnt out theatre with an inexperienced director and a delusional cast is ludicrous. However, as well as seeing the funny side of his obsession with the play, the audience also sees a very fragile and sad side to Roy's personality which develops his character in a deeper manner.

The characters in this play are very varied and, whilst much of the comedy may be derived from the characters, it is not laughing at them as patients – but rather the absurdity of their situation – that makes the audience laugh. Within this comic relief though, are serious and very tragic lives unfolding. Nowra avoids creating a play that is too melancholic, thus avoiding pathos, by maintaining the comedy throughout. Because of this sensitive delivery, the audience is able to witness the tragedy of the lives and circumstances of the patients without ridiculing them or feeling it becomes too bleak.

Messiah:
one who is anticipated as, regarded as, or professes to be a saviour or liberator.

Melancholic:
sad, gloomy.

Pathos:
misery, sorrow.

Vernacular is the language specific to a country or region.

Superfluous: in excess, unnecessary.

language

The language Nowra employs is typically Australian and through the dialogue he creates several stereotypical Australian characters. The Australian vernacular has its own comedic timing; it has a rhythm and a sound all of its own. Its earthy and raw qualities correlate directly to the characters in the play, and the personalities from the wards they are representing. This is juxtaposed against the lyrical and highly structured dialogue that is part of *Cosi fan tutte*. The moral tone that is evident in lines delivered in the play *Cosi fan tutte* enables Nowra to convey the serious considerations of love and fidelity without compromising the characters he has created, who exist within the confines of the mental asylum.

metaphors

Nowra has created a greater complexity to his work through setting his play in an abandoned, burnt out theatre. The theatre itself sits on land discarded by the government; it had become superfluous to their requirements and had been sold. The theatre is a superfluous burden to the government's resources literally, and metaphorically. It now houses those who have been deemed not to be contributing to the worth of society and are thus themselves discarded.

There are several moments in the play that are enveloped in darkness. The play opens with the three friends Lewis, Lucy and Nick, stumbling around in the dark, in search for the theatre. While they are literally on stage in the dark, metaphorically they are struggling to find their way through the socio-political quagmire that the Vietnam War had presented to their generation. The darkness of the theatre offers the cast a secluded escape from the harsh reality of their existence within the wards. Julie reflects that what she hates about the wards is the fact that "there's always a light on in the corridor or whatever ... [it is] never true pitch black" (p. 66). Conversely, for Ruth it provokes disturbing memories of the derogatory way an ex-boyfriend used to treat her, accentuating the "darkness of mental illness" (p. xv) and that those inflicted with the illness lived an existence that was largely misunderstood so that they themselves became "an impenetrable jungle" (p. xv).

Ironically, light is used to accentuate significant shifts in the play, or in the play's characters. When Lewis and Julie find themselves in the dark and kiss passionately, they are unconscious of the others' awareness of their embrace, their attraction for each other, and thus their own vulnerabilities have been revealed to all. The play itself helps to cast light on the infidelity of Lucy and Lewis' relationship as well as highlighting for him the personal growth that he is experiencing through his involvement with the play.

main characters

Lewis Riley

- Lewis is:**
- *genuine*
 - *empathetic*
 - *admirable*
 - *sincere*
 - *unsure of the direction he wants to take*
- Lewis is the protagonist of the play. He is 21 years old, and has just left university and is quite naive and inexperienced. He has accepted the job as the director of a play, which is a project in a mental institution, because he needs the money. However, Lewis' idealism and naivety enable him to launch into the production with enthusiasm and passion. This enthusiasm becomes an endearing quality, as he is able to see the worth of what he is doing for the individuals involved. Comically, his lack of musical experience, and even his inexperience with the classical composer Mozart, fail to discourage him or deter his resilience. He is bullied and demeaned by Roy, who aggressively challenges his ideas and is disappointed by his inexperience.

Burgeoning:
growing, developing.

Lewis is transformed
by the genuine and
true nature of the
patients.

Efficacy:
capacity for
producing a desired
result or effect;
effectiveness.

Lewis undergoes significant changes as he is forced to overcome several challenges throughout the play. There are moral and ethical challenges that cause him to reflect deeply on what his values are, who he is, and what his hopes are for his future. Lewis' involvement in, and commitment to the play, are catalysts for momentous changes in him that mark his burgeoning maturity. In the beginning, when the audience first encounters Lewis, he has little self-confidence and minimal experience in the 'real world', but he is transformed by his role in directing the play and ultimately by the authenticity of the patients. He commences the play by avoiding conflict, yet concludes the whole experience confidently resolving conflict and mediating between several of the patients' unique personality traits without judgement or pretension. On a more personal level, he also confronts the conflict that exists in his relationships with Lucy and Nick. His growing resoluteness in his disregard for their actions signals a prosperous and fulfilling future for him. The mark of Lewis' growing independence and robustness is the fact that he can make a stand against his friends. Lewis is clearly annoyed by the arrogance and lack of integrity that he sees in his friend Nick, and is somewhat surprised by the social efficacy that the patients demonstrate in comparison to his friends. Ironically, within the walls of the burnt out theatre, Lewis becomes somewhat marginalised from 'his' society. He finds he has lost the preoccupation with the Vietnam War protests, once shared with his friends, which formed a significant part of his culture and sense of self.

Lewis develops the
ability to be true to
his compassionate
nature.

He is now isolated from this and is forced to confront his own beliefs and morals, a process he finds liberating.

Throughout the play, Roy ironically calls Lewis 'Jerry' as a play on the name of the famous comedian, Jerry Lewis. This acts to emphasise Roy's understanding of the theatre and, by implication, promotes himself as Jerry Lewis's equally famous sidekick Dean Martin. The two comedians were partners in comedy performances, where Dean Martin was cast as the more suave and intelligent of the duo, and Jerry as the slapstick fool.

The play forces Lewis to take responsibility for not only himself but also the physical and emotional welfare of the cast. This somewhat propels him from his self-centred pursuits of 'his' protest, or 'his' ambitions, to make a difference and to be worthy of something notable. His involvement in the play is a confronting turning point for Lewis in his personal development. He is forced to mature and consider others and place their needs before his own. He grows to accept Cherry's amorous attentions and to understand what is behind Roy's actions and attitude. He can see what the play means to the patients, and he too has a point to prove to Nick, Justin, Roy and himself: that he can do it, that he is "not going to let them down" (p. 70), regardless of how much Lucy taunts him about how "working with these people has changed [him]" (p. 70).

Lewis is somewhat loosely based on the playwright Louis Nowra himself, their names being synonyms. Not only did they both have to visit their grandmothers in mental institutions and be confronted with the change in who they had become, but this experience prompted them both to consider their own mortality and place in society. Lewis reveals his steadfast loyalty to his grandmother whom he visited in a mental institution. He recognised that even though she "was mad", she remained his grandmother. His loyalty and duty towards her expose Lewis' compassionate and kind nature.

Lewis has integrity: he knows what is right and is able to make a stand. He is not willing to compromise his commitment to, and understanding of, his relationship with Lucy. While Nick may chastise him for "being old-fashioned", Lewis' belief systems are admirable and respectable; he has dealt with sadness and difficulty in his life which has given substance to his character.

Lewis is initially presented as an idealistic, naive young man; however, his acute perceptiveness and sensitivity develop as he experiences different worlds. He is a good man who has a great deal of patience, a good sense of humour, tolerance of others and the endurance to be 'stable' for the patients who come to rely upon him.

In the end, Lewis gains as much from the experience as the patients do; he gains self respect and confidence. Lewis learns a great deal about himself, yet he also learns about others and their world. His experience with the patients teaches him humility and tolerance for others. He learns to accept the patients for who they are, and not to fear them nor pity them. He also gains a deep respect for their personal strengths and accepts their individual idiosyncrasies or flaws. Lewis can see the patients for who they are and what they have to offer as individuals, whereas Nick and Lucy can only see how different they are from themselves. Lewis is deeply hurt and ashamed by his friends' spiteful actions as he is sensitive to the patients' feelings and needs. Lewis' growth and maturity is highlighted in his postscript to the audience where he accepts Julie's fate and applauds Ruth and Zac's successes. He has discovered the richness that can be attained through honest relationships.

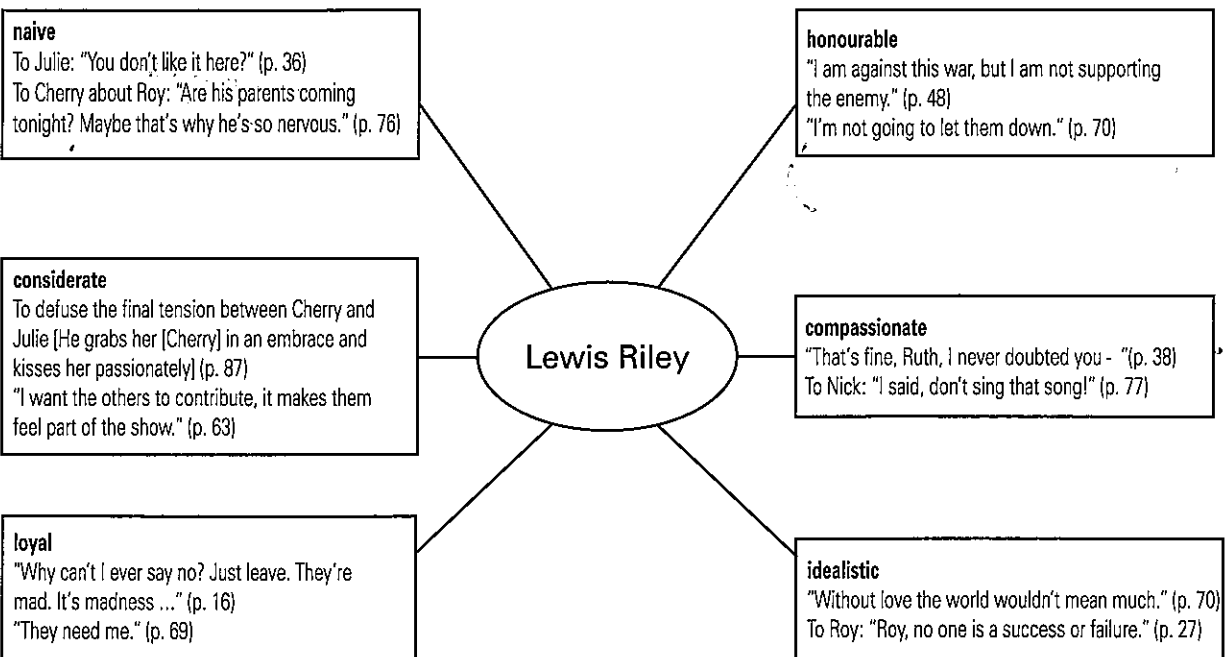
Lewis is not without his own flaws though. By kissing Julie, prior to Lucy's admission, he is not being faithful to his relationship with Lucy either. He acts selfishly, becoming immersed in his play and disregarding any commitment he may have made to political activism, his friend Nick's play, or his girlfriend.

While he is initially cynical about love, Lewis eventually confirms that he believes in it; with that comes fidelity, honesty and commitment. He learns a great deal about himself and relationships; he has not only survived the journey but thrived as a result of it.

focus questions

- Is Lewis simply too naive for his own good?
- Is Lewis to blame for the breakdown of his relationship with Lucy at all?
- Does the audience admire Lewis? Are they meant to admire him?

Idiosyncrasies are one's quirky characteristics.



Lucy White

Lucy is:

- indifferent
- confident
- forthright
- promiscuous

Lucy is in her early 20s and is Lewis' girlfriend. They live together with their friend Nick. It is unclear how long they have been in a relationship; however, they have discussed their commitment and the future of their relationship in terms of marriage and children.

She is still at university and is writing a thesis for her Master of Arts. Lucy is an independent young woman and a political activist. She is forthright in her opinions and firmly believes that she is right. Where Lewis undergoes significant personal change throughout the course of the play, Lucy does not.

A catalyst
is a person or thing that activates an event or change.

Lucy is
omnipresent, her presence and influence is felt, regardless of whether she is physically present.

Mores:
practices, traditions or customs.

Bourgeois:
a person belonging to the middle class.

Lucy's stage role is minor as she is not physically present on the stage very often; however, it is her relationship with Lewis that acts as a catalyst for the tension between the other female characters in the play. Therefore Lucy is somewhat omnipresent. She is unfaithful to Lewis through her affair with his friend Nick. Once Lucy reveals the affair to Lewis, it alters the audience's perception of her, creating dynamism in the way that the audience perceives her actions. She is judged harshly, yet she is not afforded the opportunity to defend nor explain her actions; it is because of the relationship the audience has formed with Lewis that they reject her actions. This serves to highlight the growing distance between Lewis and his peers, as Lewis cannot accept the morality of their affair. This is ironically set against the backdrop of 'free love'. Lucy be perceived as rather ruthless and selfish for her straightforward approach to Lewis and her response to the people he is working with. Alternatively, she may be interpreted as confident with her sexuality, not preoccupied by love and its expectations, therefore representing women of the sexual revolution.

Lucy highlights Lewis' life outside of the theatre and before his involvement with the play. The audience is able to make comparisons with what he 'was' like, or 'could have been' like without his experiences with *Cost*.

Lucy acts as a representation of the women's movement of the 1970s. She is clearly emancipated, sexually liberated, independent and university educated. She is cynical about love and considers it an indulgence of the 'bourgeois', a superfluous consequence. The conflict between Lewis and Lucy's ideals about love mirror society's conflict

between traditional expectations and the push to liberate love, and enjoy it for what it offers. Attitudes towards love, relationships and commitment were, and are, in a state of flux.

Lucy is presented as a very sexual being, whom Doug desires. His crassness regarding her sexuality is indicative of the candidness of acknowledging sexual desire and sexuality in the 70s. While she represents the sexual freedom of the times, her lack of empathy for the patients reflects the general lack of understanding of that component of society, those who are not able to be as liberated as she.

focus questions

- Is Lucy selfish?
- Is the audience encouraged to view Lucy critically?

Nick

Nick is also a student who is completing a thesis. He lives with Lewis and Lucy and directs students' plays at university.

He acts as an alternative 'real world' male character, a point of reference and comparison for the audience. Although Nick is involved in several 'projects' to activate and "radicalise the nation" (p. 76), he does not have the same sincerity and humility that Lewis demonstrates. Nick both literally and metaphorically "tumble[s] in the darkness" (p. 1), trying to achieve something he believes is important.

He is self-assured and boldly believes that he can improve the play with his fleeting input. While Nick is not present on stage very often, he is a dominant force, highlighting Lewis' characteristics and the change that he undergoes.

Nick is dismissive of Lewis' involvement in the asylum theatre project; he deems it a waste of time. He belittles the choice of an insignificant and frivolous play about love and fidelity, when he is involved in the much more serious pursuits of political activism, in particular organising moratorium marches. While the audience may be inclined to dismiss Nick quickly because of his arrogance, he is, as much as Lewis is, doing what he believes in and is trying to make positive change.

Nick reveals his malicious nature when he mocks the patients. He is intolerant of their needs and represents the attitude's of society at that

- Nick is:**
- idealistic
 - arrogant
 - insensitive
 - untrustworthy
 - opinionated
 - intelligent

To belittle is to
ridicule.

time through his lack of empathy for and understanding of the patient's dignity. He is seen as callous and cruel when he torments and continues to provoke Henry, who is clearly not an intellectual match for him in an argument. Nick has a coarse brutality to his character. He is vicious in expressing his intolerance of difference in society and is insensitive and disrespectful in his response to Henry and his father's commitment to Australia. He reveals that he is supporting the Viet Cong and, as such, is in opposition to the Australian forces in Vietnam. Lewis purposely distances himself from Nick's political ideals. It is in the brutal scene with Henry that Nick reveals his double standards. He is acting and reacting with as much intolerance of marginalised groups as he is accusing the government of. In effect, Nick is as guilty of dismissing groups as the government.

When Nick enters a sexual relationship with Lucy, he betrays his friend and his comments regarding Julie's sexual attractiveness expose his arrogant self-indulgence and distinct lack of loyalty, even to Lucy. He also reveals his double standards as he has already indicated that he did not deem the project worthy, and by implication, does not see the patients as deserving of his effort or attention either.

focus question

- Does Nick's character give the audience an indication of what Lewis might have become?

Roy

- Roy is:**
- enthusiastic
 - zealous
 - aware
 - scathing
 - fabulist
 - blind to reality
- Roy is a 40–50 year old man who has spent most of his life in institutions. Throughout the play the audience learns that he is an orphan who spent his childhood in and out of foster homes and institutions. He is somewhat of a bully and has a very sharp tongue and a quick and perceptive mind. He lives very much in a fantasy world, where he believes theatre has been a large part of his childhood, when in fact, he has had as little experience as everyone else. Roy needs to be the centre of attention and is prone to exaggeration.

Beyond his criticisms of Lewis' efforts to direct, he is full of vigour, cheerful, and extraordinarily enthusiastic about the play. He is particularly keen to ensure they all perform Mozart's *Così fan tutte*. He plays the role of Guglielmo, opposite Lewis' character of Ferrando. Roy is fiercely determined for the play to match his vision, as the production was his idea and as such, it is supremely important for this project to

be a success. He is high-spirited, positive, and a very dominant personality among the patients. It is as though he is seeking affirmation and acceptance through the theatre and believes that it is "where [he] belong[s]" (p. 2). The theatre clearly offers him something beautiful in his life and an escape.

Roy is insufferable at times. He is arrogant and egotistical, rude and ungrateful. He is delusional, yet at times completely lucid and perceptive. However, beneath the bravado and self-assuredness there is a hollow sadness. His childhood was difficult and he has little faith in the concept of love, believing that it is all that's left "when you don't have enough emotion left to hate" (p. 61).

He is a fragile character beneath the tough and brusque exterior. Just prior to their debut on stage, he is paralysed by stage-fright and is reliant upon Ruth and Lewis to support him. At this moment, the audience sees his dependency and insecurity even though he is confrontational and harshly criticises Lewis and all of the others openly and often.

The energy, vitality and drive of Roy's character challenge us to question why he is institutionalised, or deemed insane. While he may seem to be enormously zealous and passionate, he is often brutally honest and with that honesty, a little crass. Apart from these qualities, he does not exhibit the same level of manic behaviour that some of the other patients demonstrate. Roy challenges the audience to question our definition of 'normal' as he confronts our tolerance of differences and idiosyncrasies.

Throughout the play, Roy and Lewis' relationship develops into respect for each other. Roy appreciates Lewis' commitment and comes to realise that without Lewis' dedication his "dream" would not be possible.

Cherry's revelation about the reality of Roy's childhood, as well as the audience's realisation that he has endured ECT, create empathy for Roy. The audience can understand his attention-seeking behaviour and neediness, as well as his cynical and tainted view of love. We see an unfamiliar side to Roy's character when he takes Doug back to his ward – he is perceptive and compassionate, and feels protective of those with whom he has developed a relationship. Through this, Roy reveals that he is capable of warmth and kindness, ironically something that Nick and Julie fail to demonstrate.

focus question

- Roy has many aspects to his character. Who is the 'real' Roy?

Doug

Doug is:

- rude
- volatile
- threatening
- dominant
- aggressive

Doug inflicts cruelty on those he sees as weaker than himself, often women.

Doug inflicts cruelty on those he sees as weaker than himself, often women.

A pyromaniac is someone who has a compulsion to light fires.

To disparage is to criticise or to ridicule.

focus question:

- Of all the characters, is Doug the most secure?

Cherry is:

- possessive
- threatening
- impulsive
- infatuated with Lewis

Cherry

Cherry is aged between 25 and 35 years and like many other characters has been in the institution for quite some time. She is immediately besotted with Lewis, and becomes extremely jealous of the growing relationship between Lewis and Julie. Cherry demonstrates her infatuation with Lewis by continually offering food or feeding him.

There is a constant rivalry between Cherry and Julie for Lewis' attention and affection. This generates conflict between her and Julie for most of the play, with Cherry often resorting to violent threats against Julie.

Cherry and Doug share a mutual dislike; nevertheless, she takes the blame for him when he attempts to set fire to the toilet in the theatre. This suggests that she is more compassionate and understanding than she may want to admit. However, her subsequent threats of violence towards Doug make it clear that her aim wasn't to protect him, but rather to protect the theatre performance and her contact with Lewis.

While Cherry is a confident and spirited character who is central to many of the comic elements of the play, she also offers insightful perceptiveness regarding the issues of love, fidelity and the human condition. She blindly and emphatically believes in the fairytale of love. In the eyes of the audience this makes her either vulnerable or admirable for her courage to continue to believe in something that proves itself so difficult. She believes in love and affection, in particular from Lewis, and her character ultimately suggests that perhaps love is worth fighting for. She understands "why a woman's heart would soften towards a man" (p. 60) who either needed her or was himself vulnerable.

focus question

- Cherry's vulnerabilities make her an appealing character. Do you agree?

Julie

- Julie is:**
- attractive
 - appealing
 - honest
 - vulnerable

Julie, who is in her early 20s, has been admitted for her drug dependency, and in many ways, she is the most 'normal' character within the play. This is her first experience of a mental institution and she admits that her family thought that it might be more "sort of like a holiday" (p. 36).

This attitude is indicative of the myths and mystique that surrounded mental asylums. In reality it was the furthest thing from a holiday. Julie is attractive and alluring to the men in the wards. She is the most realistic and intuitive of the patients because she is the one with the most recent experience of the 'outside world'. She is unassuming, and initially has a quietly cynical view of love, yet is open-minded enough to accept its possibilities. At the end of the play, Julie confesses to Lewis that she has a girlfriend who has been loyal to her and she feels compelled to abide by her loyalty and the commitment they made to each other.

Her openness and honesty is an appealing and attractive quality, a quality that Lewis recognises, and he develops a fondness for her. He opens up to Julie and talks about his family and his grandmother, and Julie listens without judgement. She is a sincere and trusting character.

Julie appreciates what the theatre experience and Lewis have created for her and seems full of possibility by the conclusion of the play. She rejects Lewis' offer of help upon her release, and is loyal to her girlfriend whom she acknowledges she owes. She admits that she had feelings for Lewis and thus accepts her sexuality. Lewis' postscript reveals that Julie did again succumb to drugs and died of an overdose in Sydney.

focus question

- Is Julie the tragic character of the play?

Ineptitude:
lack of ability.

- Henry is:**
- patriotic
 - vulnerable
 - nostalgic
 - intelligent
 - baffled
 - frustrated

To espouse is to
express or promote.

Secondary characters

Justin Anderson

Justin plays a very minor role, appearing infrequently on stage. He is the institution's social worker and is sceptical about the play's success. He is initially patronising towards Lewis suggesting that this experience will probably be "the best education" (p. 24) possible, a life-changing experience for him.

At the end of the play, the audience learns that Roy had been complaining on a daily basis about Lewis' ineptitude as a director and that Justin only suggested that "Lewis will come through" (p. 84), rather than actively supporting his efforts. He appears somewhat cynical and jaded about the possibility of rehabilitation for the patients, which is perhaps an indication of the attitude of the system he represents. However, at the conclusion of the performance he enthusiastically embraces the benefits that the experience has had on the cast and acknowledges that it has enabled many of them to blossom.

Henry

Like Roy, Henry has spent much of his life in and out of institutions. He is aged between 40 and 50 years, and as a former lawyer has a sharp intellect. Henry first appears to be quite senseless, incapable of forming a sentence without its being punctuated by a severe stutter, and Roy humiliates him for this. He is a central figure in a significant moment in the play, which acts as turning point for several of the characters. This is the scene in which Nick espouses his views on the Vietnam War and Henry has the courage and the assertiveness to confront Nick about his disloyalty and is deeply passionate in his defence of his father's war efforts. The fierceness he demonstrates is admirable, and the audience is meant to feel sadness at the rage of what must have been a brilliant mind. While love as a notion may sometimes be over romanticised, the love, devotion and commitment that Henry suggests his father and mother shared is viewed as genuine and worth pursuing. This scene acts as a catalyst for Henry, who blossoms as a result of his participation in the play.

Henry has very conservative, traditional views on the role that women should play in relationships. He admires his mother's fortitude for staying with his father in spite of the difficult man he became after his experiences at war. When the cast are reflecting on their ideas of love, Henry reveals that he was once married to the surprise of several of the cast. As he compares his wife to a "temptress", it can be concluded that the relationship did not end well. Thus Henry's attitude towards women is straightforward: women are either pure and worthy, or dirty and worthless. Henry's confession also indicates that within the walls of the asylum, he has managed to maintain some semblance of privacy and dignity.

Henry believes and operates as though he has a 'paralysed' arm, which ironically changes to the other side at the end of the play, signifying the transformation and changes he has made throughout the opera and his sense of self.

focus questions

- Is Henry just intolerant of the others?
- Henry's actions are intended to hide his true character from others. Do you agree?

Ruth

Ruth is aged between 30 and 40 years and has been in and out of institutions many times. She has an obsessive personality, fixated on the details that Lewis seems to overlook, and in this way suggests that a society needs 'all types'. She obsessively counts steps and memorises all of the lines of the play. She has great difficulty comprehending anything other than literal interpretations. She does not operate with the complexity of illusion and, as a consequence, there is something completely honest about Ruth's character.

While Ruth can be seen as needy and somewhat dull, she reveals that an ex-boyfriend treated her in a depraved manner as he "put [her] in a wardrobe so [she] wouldn't run away" (p. 66). The audience comes to understand her need for security and reassurance and the fragility of her nature.

Ruth is:

- a survivor
- resilient
- determined
- controlled
- obsessive
- hopeful

Depraved:

appalling,
demeaning.

Ironically, in Lewis' postscript at the play's conclusion he refers to Ruth's success in the outside world, a resolution that provides hope. Ruth is a survivor: she has outlasted a destructive relationship and ultimately finds success in the 'outside' world.

focus question

- Consider Ruth's complex nature. Why does Nowra make her so endearing, yet so frustrating?

Zac

Zac is the musician of the group. He is often on stage, but frequently in a comatose state because of the drugs he takes. He is a source of humour on several occasions, particularly when he insists on an overture by Wagner instead of Mozart, and he fails to see, or acknowledge, the irrelevance of his demands.

Zac's behaviour is erratic and indicates the degree to which medication was exploited as a means of treating, or dealing with, those who were mentally ill. Zac's drug dosages largely determine his level of engagement with the world. Sadly, this also determines the quality of his relationships with others, and the way he is perceived. His whole existence is manipulated by synthetic substances administered to him by others. Ironically though, once out of the institution, he leads a successful life as a musician, where his idiosyncrasies and passion result in him having "a minor hit" (p. 89).

He persistently pursues Ruth for sex and fails to see the inappropriateness of his actions. He does not have control of his sexual desires or urges which would enable him to deal with these erratic outbursts in an appropriate manner, so his unrequited attention usually results in Ruth hitting him.

Zac is very uptight and provides many of the comic elements in the play. Ironically, his final glorious moment in the play is overshadowed, or perhaps highlighted, by his collapse on stage after he takes too many of his 'pills' in a desperate attempt to cure his nerves for his performance and moment in the spotlight. This acts not only to increase the dramatic tension in the play, but also to reinforce the farcical unpredictability of Zac's nature. Sadly, it also reveals the impact that timing and fate has had on the patients' lives, as many of them

Unrequited is
unfulfilled.

Zac is:

- anxious
- creative
- unpredictable
- passionate